

# Guantanamo Bay Association

A 501 (c) (7) Organization

[www.gitmobay.org](http://www.gitmobay.org)

JANUARY 2023

It's really hard to believe but here we go on another trip around the sun. I certainly hope that each and every one of you and your families had a wonderful Christmas and New Year. I have a feeling there may still a few GBA members who somehow managed to stay up long enough to see the ball drop New Years' eve like me. lol

Our new year is starting off with some very exciting news about a trip to Gitmo and some dreadful news regarding this year's reunion. I guess it's the old, "I got some good news and I have some bad news, which do you want first". In this instance with 2023 being a brand-new year let's kick it off with the good news.

**GOOD NEWS:** We have been approved to visit to Gitmo

Joe Healey, GBA VP and Travel agent has been in contact with folks in Gitmo over the past several months trying to arrange a trip to Gitmo for the Association. His efforts paid off; he was able to obtain permission for us to visit next month (February 17<sup>th</sup> -24<sup>th</sup>). News of the trip was announced during the business meeting at the DC reunion. As you can imagine most of the available seats were immediately reserved by members at the reunion.

**BAD NEWS:** We have **NOT** been able to find a suitable hotel in Savannah for this year's reunion.

In mid-November Barbara and I took an overnight trip to Savannah to conduct a reunion hotel site visit. The first hotel on our list was the Courtyard Midtown, unfortunately their hospitality room was much too small to accommodate our needs which I expect to be between 50-60. Our next hotel was a Hilton Garden, this was an excellent match as was the third property an Embassy Suites. Both of these two are located about 12 miles from downtown Savannah both offering free parking. Parking is a big issue - hotels near the river charge \$30-40 per day which is nonnegotiable when searching for a hotel in the downtown/tourist area. Savannah being a very popular tourist designation the hotels maintain high occupancy levels making it difficult to obtain special pricing. About the best that I'm able to arrange is the Hilton at 139 + tax and 8 per person for breakfast or the Embassy Suites at 169 room rate and no breakfast included. As things presently stand, I have not heard from the Hilton after calling and leaving several messages for the sales manager. I will continue to work on finding and securing a hotel. If I'm able find one then I'll do a special notice by mail and to post the info on our website. Depending on when this happens, I may wait until the April newsletter.

Under the heading of OLD BUSINESS...last year's reunion in DC. It was kind of sad seeing such a low number attending, however due to illnesses and a variety of other issues, many of our regulars didn't make it. For the benefit of the "few" who stayed away using the excuse, "Been there done that" you missed, in my opinion, one of the very best reunions ever. I guess it could be said that there was quality over quantity. Our hotel, the Westin, was hands down spectacular in every way possible not only all the building facilities but the staff who went the extra mile in making sure that we had a great time. Following the reunion, I followed up with a thank you email to the general manager at the Westin, who wrote back, both in this issue. Even our bus driver was a real treasure she fit right in with our group! She was a true pro when it came to handling that 55-passenger bus. She did it as if she was driving a little sports car. Sitting up front was a nail bitter!

Touring days were interesting. Day 1 was the DC city tour and the War Memorials and wouldn't know it, it rained. However, this didn't seem to dampen anyone enthusiasm, although you couldn't help but feel a little bit sorry for our tour guide (a former Air Force flight physician). Some of his facts and figures were a tad off and he was corrected a few times. Lunch at the Reagan Bldg food court congers up a nightmare since there was umpteen busloads of middle schools' kids who arrived ahead of us. No, I did not plan the rain nor all the kids! Day 2 the weather cooperated, a huge sigh of relief by yours truly. Our trip to the Arlington National Cemetery was something very special for all of us, but maybe a little more so for our own honor guard: John O'Connor, Mary Anne Gardner, Pat Porter and Sheila Evans, who participated in placing a "Guantanamo Bay Association" wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns. It was a very special and moving event.

On the morning of our last day, we conducted the annual business meeting (minutes in this issue). As is customary the banquet was later that evening. A slight last-minute change to the program came when our mystery guess speaker didn't make it – still a mystery. In true Gitmo like fashion our VP Joe Healey stepped up to the mic and gave us more detailed information about the trip to Gitmo and fielded questions and answers.

Dinner and service was excellent, again hats off to the Westin staff. Having wine served with dinner added a little extra special touch to the evening. It sure was hard saying goodbye to our shipmates following the banquet and again the next morning. Where did the time go? We no sooner arrived and it was time to leave.

Good of the Order or odds and ends:

The past three months have been busy ones for us especially with the holidays.

I can't hardly wait to show everyone what ole Saint Nick gave me this year – it's a Jim Dandy!! There's a good chance the TSA might be amused but boys will be boys.

For some strange reason I was pretty well convinced that we were going to escape 2022 hurricane free, boy was I wrong. Hurricane Ian, closely followed by Tropical Storm Nicloe both managed to do about the same amount of damage to my place. Luckily both storms only flooded my yard and in both instances the water wasn't high enough to make it inside the house. Now where's the FEMA flood guy with my damage money.

We closed out the year on a high note. In mid-November Barbara finally received a call from Southern Guide Dogs, this is the call she had been waiting to receive for over two years. They called to notify her that they had found her a dog and to give her a report date for training at their facility in Palmetto. The Sunday after Thanksgiving we dove down to Palmetto which is located little north of Sarasota...OMG the traffic was for the record books heavy. Monday morning after arriving at what I called Pow Wow U we were given a tour of the training and boarding facilities; both are hands down beautiful. Since class officially kicked off after lunch Monday, I hit the road heading home. Training lasted for about three weeks. All of the student's train, live, and eat on campus, all of this this is provided cost free to them. A week before Christmas I picked up Barbara and Reilly her new companion. Reilly, is a 65 pound, two-year-old yellow Lab who is an amazedly well-trained dog and is a perfect fit for Barbara. Living and traveling with a guide dog is going to take some getting used to on our part. Reily already knows what she needs to do. She is all about taking care of business when her harness goes on, but then rest of the time she is just a typical, lovable, and affectionate Labrador.

Christmas for us is somewhat protracted. We left Barbara's at 0700 to drive to my daughters' place where we opened gifts with her/husband and three kids (so much for cutting back). Later about noon my son showed up with his tribe- more gifting. About 1400 we drove to Barbara's daughters' place in Jacksonville – more gifting and dinner. Finally, about 1800 we made it back to where we started, tired from a long day but with some great memories of a wonderful Christmas with all of our homies. We are blessed!

From Mike aka **ED** - Happy New Year

Guantanamo Bay Association  
Washington, DC Reunion  
Business Meeting  
15 October 2022

The annual Business meeting of the Guantanamo Bay Association was brought to order by President John O'Connor at 0905, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mary Anne Gardner read the minutes of the last meeting, which were accepted as read.

Vice Presidents Report: Joe Healey announced we are still working on a trip to GTMO. He is waiting for the base to get back to him. We have no dates and no numbers as yet, but he will provide more information at the banquet.

Mike Warman provided more information on the reunion. The Hospitality Room will close at 1600, by which time all Silent Auction bids will be final. Winners will be announced at the banquet, which will be held in the Rivian Room D across the hall. There will be no formal entertainment at the banquet. A new member of the organization, who is a Cuban refugee, had agreed to speak, but has not been heard from since January. Original banquet plans included an open bar, but instead we will provide wines and the hotel will charge a corkage fee.

-Raffle tickets will be available for \$1 each, 7 for \$5, items to be announced later.

-Members may keep their name tags, or return them for future use.

-After the banquet, please remove your items from the hospitality suite, including coolers.

-Feel free to take any extra snacks with you.

Membership: The organization data base has about 480 names, about 160 are dues payers. Since advertising in several magazines (VFW, American Legion, Fleet Reserve) there has been an uptick in interest as evidenced by inquiries. The website receives 25-60 visits each day, well worth the \$15 per month we spend on it. We need to increase our focus on recruitment initiatives—our youngest member is 60, oldest 83.

Treasurers Report: We will lose \$2-3K on this reunion, mostly because of transportation costs. The planning targeted 50 attendees, but we only had about 30. Several questions were asked about planning and budgets. Mike said he has general guidelines, but pretty much wings it. He offered to work with anyone interested in learning how he does it. He mentioned several of the things he considers in planning (Convention and Visitors Bureau for the site, rooms, breakfast, trips) then adds a percentage to include tips for guides and bus drivers. He will include the treasurers report in the January newsletter, with a recap of the reunion.

Old Business: The next reunion will be in Savannah, GA, possibly the second week in October. Several hotels are under consideration, one near town, one a short bus ride from the river. Information is being shared with Ed Astle, who had volunteered to assist with planning. A member asked if perhaps our low attendance was due to "lingering effects of the pandemic." Mike said probably not—most absences were age and/or health related.

New Business: Suggestions for sites for the 2024 reunion were solicited. Pensacola Beach was suggested by Pat Porter, Williamsburg, VA by Bill Miller, Nashville by George Kennedy. Sheila Evans and Diane Rickhoff offered to work up a go-by for reunion planning, based on Mike's comments. Mike announced that this reunion was his last as host. A show of hands was overwhelmingly in favor of Pensacola Beach for 2024.

John O'Connor the summed up the meeting, reminding attendees to remove their items from the hospitality room, and that the Silent Auction ends at 1600.

Joe Healey then voiced appreciation for all of Mike's hard work for the reunion.

George Kennedy stood to commend those who have lost a spouse but continue to attend.

Andy Anderson stood to thank the officers and members, noting that GTMO continues to live in the organization.

The meeting was adjourned at 0958

Here we are wrapping up another year. I will be starting year four of my retirement and it feels like I retired just yesterday. I still haven't figured out what I want to do during my retirement. I found one great way to fill some of the time and that is spending time with members of the Guantanamo Bay Association. I have enjoyed visiting the sites for the reunion and meeting so many great people. We have many more experiences ahead of us in the coming years.

Following our last reunion in Washington, DC, we were able to spend time with good friends from the Marine Corps whom we have known for many years. We visited several more sites around the Capital including the Marine Corps Museum and Quantico. Afterwards, we were able to swing by the mountains of southwestern Virginia and visit our family.

I have continued to call bingo for one of the local VFW's one or two times a week. I try to go to the gym five days a week and work some in the yard every day. We also stay active in the local Marine Corps League in Ocala.

I was looking forward to family visiting us here in Florida in November for Thanksgiving, which is a recent tradition, but due to health issues they were not able to make the trip. Karen and I were still able to have a wonderful Thanksgiving Day and meal on our own. Then another long-term tradition which is spending our Christmas every year in the mountains of Virginia with all our family was also cancelled due to my heart going out of rhythm. Once again Karen and I had a great time here in Florida on our own but we really missed seeing our family. Now two added pills and all the side effects that go with it, my heart is back in rhythm and all is well.

I hope everyone had a great Christmas and I wish all a Happy New Year. I am hoping that 2023 will be better financially for everyone and we all stay safe and healthy. I hope our attendance to the reunion increases and look forward to our Savannah, Georgia trip.

John and Karen O'Connor

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Good morning Mr. Wieder,

On behalf of the Guantanamo Bay Association, who recently conducted our annual reunion at the Westin Dulles, I want to thank you and your incredible team of dedicated staff.

This year's reunion was one of the best ever thanks in part to the Westin staff who were an absolute joy to work with. Thanks to their efforts, my job as the reunion coordinator was so much easier. From the front desk to housekeeping and all in between, everyone who I came in contact with was friendly, helpful and professional. In particular I want to personally thank Kathleen in sales, Evelyn Sullivan, Mathew (front desk) and your head of maintenance, who all played a significant role in ensuring the success of our event. Plus, I'd be a little remiss if I didn't mention the hotel itself. I received several compliments from our members about how nice the facility was.

Thank you so much for everything.

Regards,

Mike Warman

Hi Mike,

Thanks so much for the kind note and for getting my day off to a great start. I was not surprised at your comments about our staff because I agree with you and see the great things, they do every day. We are thankful to participate in military reunions as it connects us with every day heroes. I will share your feedback with our team and wish you and all the members the very best.

Warmest Regards,

Steve General Manager Westin Washington Dulles airport  
2520 Wasser Terrace, Herndon, VA 20171

Commanding Officer Captain Samuel White, Commander U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay Cuba and his wife Robin Vegas White have invited the Guantanamo Bay Association to hold a reunion on the base. This information was announced at the GBA's stateside reunion in Northern Virginia in October of this year.

Association policy is to give preference to those that have attended the latest stateside reunion if a return trip to Guantanamo Bay is scheduled.

The dates for the trip will be Friday, February 17, 2023 through Friday, February 24, 2023. The visit will coincide with the 120th anniversary of the signing of the lease between Cuba and the United States. At the present time we are limited to 40 visitors. Lodging has been identified; air transportation is being worked out by our point of contact. We will be staying at the Navy Gateway Inn and Suites on Windward. Standard Deluxe (SD) suites have a queen bed, small living room with couch and a dinette. SD rate is \$87 per night.

Anyone who intends to make the trip must be a member in good standing of the GUANTANAMO BAY ASSOCIATION or accompany a member on the trip. Members can check the October 2022 newsletter to ascertain when their dues are paid through. The date after your name indicates when you must renew your membership.

Everyone must have a valid U.S. Passport. If you don't have a current Passport, you should apply for one now.

Currently, you must be vaccinated for COVID-19 in order to travel with our group.

Rental cars are available on a first come, first served basis. Daily rental rates range from \$37 to \$56. A reservation does not guarantee a particular class of car. From experience, you may get a Ford Focus for \$37 per day, or a minivan for \$56 a day. Please inform me if you wish to rent a car as soon as you make that decision.

For this visit, everyone must have a reserved seat on the Patriot Express (PE) aircraft. The PE is (usually) a commercial 737-800 aircraft chartered by the Air Mobility Command. The flight will originate at Naval Air Station Jacksonville. JAX-GTMO-JAX. As of October 1, 2022 the tariff rate (one-way price) is \$399 per person. Round trip transportation is \$798 per person. A reservation will be made through the base, tickets will be paid for by credit card only at the time of the flight. Military Space Available is not authorized for our group.

SECNAV form 5512/1 Base Access Pass must be completed by each individual and approved by Base Security. I will forward a 5512/1 to everyone that continues to be interested in visiting the base.

Everyone should have MEDEVAC insurance. If you don't have proof of a policy, the Association is looking into obtaining a group travel policy that includes MEDEVAC. Preliminary price estimates to ensure your trip indicates that a group policy would cost between \$75-\$100 per person.

### Gitmo trip 2023

Every visitor must be able to get around on their own. If you require a wheelchair or walker, unfortunately you won't be able to travel with the group.

There is a possibility that we will have to reimburse the Naval Base for our transportation costs while visiting. These expenses may include paying for the cost of the bus and driver for any tours we do while visiting. The most recent visits included one or two days of excursions on the base. If the GBA incurs a cost, each visitor will be assessed a fair share.

Please confirm that you still intend to make the trip. Please let me know if you cannot make the trip. We want to make sure that we max out the number of allowed visitors.

If you decide not to participate, please let me know ASAP. The above info will be released in the January 2023 Newsletter, or sooner on the GBA website. I'd like to give others an opportunity to visit the base.

If you said you were going on the trip at the reunion or shortly thereafter, and are still interested in visiting the base, please send me your name(s) and date(s) of birth so that I can press on with group medical/MEDEVAC insurance inquiries. Please let me know if you have proof of current MEDEVAC coverage. Please include your phone contact info, preferably cell phone number.

I'm traveling at the moment, and will be returning to home base by late Sunday, November 20, 2022. If you can respond no later than 11-20-22, I would appreciate it.

If you have any questions, or I have not been clear on something, please feel free to email me for answers/clarification. I should be able to answer emails each evening. Unfortunately, I won't be able to take phone calls until 9-21-22

Have a great week, I hope to hear from everyone soon.

Joe Healey  
GBA VP/Travel

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General Manager  
The Westin Washington Dulles airport  
2520 Wasser Terrace, Herndon, VA 20171

## Membership and Communications

New and returning members:

October - January 2023

M. Warman CM

E. Ouzts

S. Evans\*CM

R. Granger

G. Welch

L. Grable LM\$

T. Livsey\*

W. Gazar

P. Hubbard\*\$

**J. Dunning**

R. Anderson\*\$

J. Craig

**E. Beard**

**J. Blake**

R. Hurt

J. Fitkin\*

C. Donaldson

D. Delage

**G. White**

J. Buehrens

J. Forton

D. Gibson

G. Coupland

W. O'Brien

G. Songer

K. Whitley

M Pijacki

J. Healey

D. Healey

N. Hurst

M. Gardner

J. Fields

M. Fuller

D. Mella

M. Forton

R. Haines

F. Keller

B. Gray

E. Alliston

R. Gorman

E. Edgar

L. Jessup

B. Willingham

W. Miller

J. Doyle\*\$

\*two + year membership

**BOLD** = new members

CM = charter member

\$ = donation

**Please take note of the DATE next to your NAME on the newsletter address label. The expense of printing and mailing our newsletter continues to increase. We rely on membership dues, please stay current.**

**If I missed listing your name or made some other mistake or omission, please let me know.**

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John and Karen O'Connor

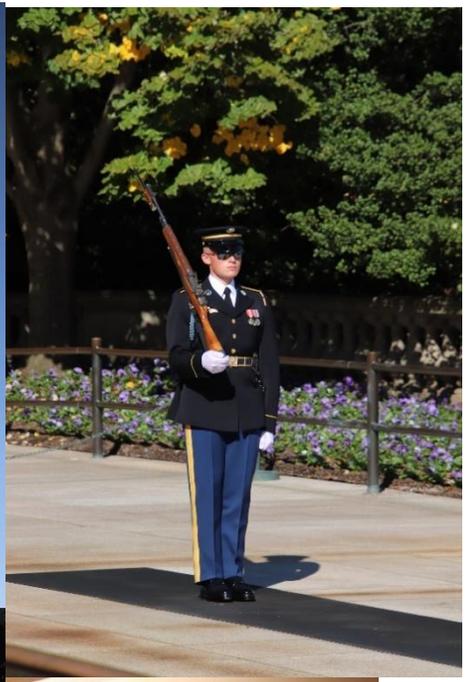
## Auld Lang Syne.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to min'?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And days o' lang syne?  
For auld lang syne, my dear,  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne!

We twa hae run about the braes,  
And pu't the gowans fine;  
But we've wander'd mony a weary foot,  
Sin' auld lang syne.  
We twa hae paidl't i' the burn,  
Frae mornin' sun till dine:  
But seas between us braid hae roar'd,  
Sin' auld lang syne.

And here's a hand, my trusty fiere,  
And gie's a hand o' thine;  
And we'll take a right guid willie-waught,  
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp,  
And surely I'll be mine;  
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne.  
For auld lang syne, my dear,  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne!



GBA Reunion  
Washington DC  
2022

